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ABSTRACT

A national survey assessed principals' attitudes, beliefs, and practices concerning child abuse and its prevention. Of particular interest were principals': (1) attitudes concerning the amount and quality of child abuse education in schools; (2) responses to suspected cases of child abuse and neglect; (3) perceptions of possible barriers to reporting; (4) perception of the importance of school-based preventive services; (5) beliefs about abolishing corporal punishment in schools. Participants were the largest and smallest districts, both urban and rural, in 29 counties. Counties were 13 percent northeastern, 12 percent midwestern, 37 percent southern, and 38 percent southwestern. A total of 152 elementary school and 34 high school principals returned questionnaires. Findings indicated that: (1) principals were satisfied with the information and education on child abuse they provide to school staff and by the education provided by their districts; (2) the vast majority of schools have written policies regarding the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect, and principals and teachers who actively report cases; (3) schools do a laudable job of linking at-risk clients and school and community services; and (4) schools provide prevention services that are integrated into educational curricula. Findings suggest discrepancies between awareness levels of principals and teachers. (RH)

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Schools and Child Abuse: A National Survey of Principals' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Practices

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SCHOOLS AND CHILD ABUSE: A NATIONAL SURVEY OF PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES

Increasing demands have been made for schools to act as key institutions through which to channel child abuse identification, intervention, and prevention efforts due to their frequent, on-going, and long-term contact with children (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989; Cohn, 1983; Fairorth, 1982; Zellman, 1990). School personnel in all fifty states and Washington D.C. are legally mandated to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect (Broadhurst, 1986). The rationale behind this legal reporting requirement centers around the potential of school personnel to identify cases before the level of severity becomes such that medical professionals or police are made aware of the situation (NCCAN, 1983; Zellman, 1990). Additionally, in view of school traditions of providing social and health services (Schlossman, Brown, & Sedlak, 1986 as cited in Zellman, 1990) and the opportunity for educators to model non-violent discipline techniques as a strategy to prevent child abuse (Romano, 1989), educational institutions have been targeted as primary agents in prevention. Thus, educators have been perceived as front-line professionals whose contact with children affords them the opportunity and responsibility for prevention and early detection of child abuse.

In response to the increasing demand for schools to take an active role in the identification, intervention, and prevention of child abuse, the National Committee for Prevention

of Child Abuse (NCPCA) has conducted a number of national studies to examine this issue (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989; Daro, Abrahams, & Robson, 1988; Daro, Casey, and Abrahams, 1990). School district level data reveal that 95% of districts have set policies on reporting suspected cases of child abuse and 59% have policies mandating child assault prevention education for their students (Daro, Casey, & Abrahams, 1990). A survey of 568 teachers on their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about child abuse and its prevention, found that 74% of teachers had suspected at least one case of child abuse among their students (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989). Further, over 90% of teachers supported the implementation of sexual assault prevention programs and more than 80% felt it was very important to provide community referrals to abusive families, to lend support, encouragement, and understanding to child victims of abuse, and to model non-violent conflict resolution.

Finally, the general public has been found to support the implementation of prevention services in schools. Eighty-three percent of respondents in a telephone survey, conducted at the request of NCPCA, strongly agree that elementary schools should offer safety instruction and 84% strongly agreed that schools should teach children how to ask for help if they are being physically abused (Schulman, Ronca, Bucuvalas, 1990). Less than 3% of the respondents disagreed, either strongly or somewhat, with schools playing these types of child abuse prevention roles.

With data available on school district policies, teachers' responses to their role in confronting child abuse, and public opinion with respect to this issue, gaps in knowledge existed on the school principal level. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) notes, "the principal is the one individual who is directly involved in every aspect of the school's operation, and therefore is the primary figure in determining the school's quality and character" (NAESP, 1990). Responsibilities of principals can include:

- determining services offered within schools;
- setting school level policies;
- implementing district/state policies;
- serving as the liaison to outside systems;
- serving as the liaison between parents, teachers, and students; and
- ensuring the provision of training to teachers.

With respect to reporting behavior, in particular, the paucity of data on principals precludes a complete understanding of school systems' responses to child abuse. While research on teachers reveals that teachers generally report known cases to school counselors or administrators (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989), other studies have indicated that only a small percentage of reports concerning school aged children originate from school personnel (American Association for Protecting Children, 1988; Westat, 1988). In that NCPCA's National Teacher Survey (NTS) suggested internal reporting policies for teachers, (i.e., only

23% of teachers indicated reporting directly to Child Protective Services, and 90% of teachers report suspected cases primarily to the school principal or social worker), a screening process within schools seemed apparent (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989). Other research also suggests possible screening of reports on the part of principals (Zellman, 1990).

Given the critical role of schools in child abuse prevention, the unique position of administrators to influence school activities, and the lack of data on this group of professionals, NCPCA conducted a national survey of principals to assess their attitudes, beliefs, and practices concerning child abuse and its prevention. More specifically, the National Principal Survey (NPS) sought to answer the following questions:

- What are principals' attitudes concerning the amount and quality of child abuse education in schools?
- What are principals' responses to suspected cases of child abuse and neglect?
- What do principals perceive as possible barriers to reporting?
- How important do principals feel it is for their schools to provide prevention services?
- As part of their efforts to prevent child abuse, what are principals' beliefs about abolishing corporal punishment in schools?

METHOD

The National Principal Survey (NPS), like all of NCPCA's efforts to examine school policies around child abuse, relied upon a random stratified sample of 29 counties, both rural and urban, drawn for the federally funded National Incidence Study (NIS) (Westat, 1988). For the purposes of this study, both the smallest and largest districts in each of the 29 counties were contacted, with the exception of those counties with only one unified school district. Of the 49 districts contacted, 40 agreed to participate in the study. Of the 40 districts, 27.5% were in the Northeast, 35% were in the Midwest, 12.5% were in the South, and 30% were in the Southwest. This sampling procedure is the same as was used for the National Teacher Survey (NTS) (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989), thereby allowing for comparable data to be developed.

Surveys were sent to the attention of every elementary school and every high school principal in each of the sample districts. Within the districts there were 444 elementary and 74 high schools; thus a total of 518 surveys were sent out. Thirteen percent of the schools were located in the Northeast, 12% were in the Midwest, 37% were in the South and 38% were in the Southwest. Slightly different versions of surveys were sent to elementary school and high school principals. This was done to accommodate the fact that different prevention services may be more or less appropriate for students of different ages. For example, high school principals were asked about services

directed specifically at teen age parents and elementary school principals were asked about child sexual assault prevention programs.

The response rates for the two surveys were 35% for elementary school principals (155 surveys returned) and 46% for high school principals (34 surveys returned). Three of the elementary school surveys were coded as invalid, one because it was not filled out by a principal, two because the schools served only a special needs population. Though follow up postcards were sent to maximize the response rate, it was impossible to selectively target non-respondents because of the anonymous nature of the survey. Although the low response rate in this study warrants caution in interpreting the data, a response rate of 50% or less is typical of the methodology employed (Dillman, 1978). This response rate is similar to other surveys of this sort. For example, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) conducts a decennial survey of school principals. Their most recent survey had a response rate of 34.5%. The recent survey done by the Gail Zellman at the RAND Corporation had a significantly higher response rate (69%), but it should be noted that names of participants were known in that survey, making selective targeting of non-respondents possible.

SAMPLE

The National Principal Survey sample consisted of 152 elementary school and 34 high school principals. There were a total of 89,705 elementary school students (n=150, two

respondents did not answer the question) and 42,488 high school students (n=32) enrolled in the responding schools. The average elementary school size was 598 students, somewhat larger than the mean school size of 472 students noted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals' survey finding. This compares to an average high school size of 1328 students.

The elementary school respondents include 66 males (43%), 85 females (56%), and one individual who did not indicate his or her gender. The high school respondents included 23 males (68%) and 9 females (27%), as well as two individuals who did not indicate their genders. The sex breakdown of the NPS is quite different from that noted by the NAESP, which found 80% of elementary principals to be males and only 20% to be females. This variation may be due to differential propensities of men and women to respond to surveys on child abuse and neglect. It is not anticipated that the larger than expected number of women responding to the survey will have significant impact on the results in that many questions reflect school policy rather than individual opinions.

The geographic distribution of the sample is shown in the following table.

Table 1

Geographic Distribution

	Elementary Schools	High Schools
Northeast	17%	6%
Midwest	14%	15%
South	33%	27%
Southwest	34%	44%
	n=148	n=31

The South and Southwest regions have a greater number of schools in their districts than the Midwestern and Northeastern districts and thus the sample is representative.

With respect to experience, 20% of the elementary school sample had five years experience or less, 63% were fairly experienced having held their positions six to 20 years (of these 27.6% had six to ten years experience and 35.5% had 11 to 20 years experience), while almost 13% of the sample was extremely experienced, having been in positions of school administration for over 20 years. The comparable figures for the high school principals are: 12% relatively new to their profession with five years experience or less, 62% moderately experienced (9% six to ten years experience and 53% 11 to 20 years experience), and 21% of the sample having over 20 years of experience.

The age breakdown of the sample is reported in Table 2. This distribution is similar to that found by the NAESP. The NAESP found 4.7% of principals are under 35 years of age, 38% are between 35 and 44, 39.1% are between 45 and 54, 13.5% are between 55 and 59, and 4.7% are 60 years of age or older. Further, NAESP found that in recent years, the percentage of females has increased in the youngest age categories while the percentage of males has decreased.

Demographic variables were examined more closely to check for variations by region and sex in the NPS sample. The only significant variations were for the elementary school principals. The profile of principal's experience differed by region and sex.

Table 2

Age Distribution for Principals

Age Categories	Elementary Schools	High Schools
Under 35	2%	3%
36-45	43%	29%
46-55	36%	4%
56-65	19%	12%
Over 65	0%	3%
n=	151	32

Less than 10% of the principals in the Midwest and South reported over 20 years of experience compared to 32% and 20% of the principals in the Southwest and Northeast, respectively, who reported this level of experience. Further, 20% of the male respondents compared to 8% of the female respondents reported this high level of experience. This is consistent with the NAESP's finding that more women have recently been entering the profession of school principal.

SURVEY FINDINGS

School Policy

Ninety five percent of the sample elementary school principals and 94% of responding high school principals noted that their schools have clearly defined procedures for the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Of such schools, the most common way of informing employees of the procedure is through in-service workshops or staff meetings (92% of elementary schools and 78% of high schools). Other forms of notifying employees are including the procedure in a policy manual (70% of elementary schools, 63% of high schools), distributing a copy to all staff (67% of elementary schools, 63% of high schools), and explaining the procedure during new teacher orientation (51% of elementary schools and 63% of high schools). Eighty-five percent of elementary and 70% of high school principals report that they circulate materials on child abuse and neglect.

On balance, principals report far greater satisfaction with the available material on this topic than do teachers. Only 28% of elementary and 34% of high school principals report dissatisfaction with the information they are able to distribute to their staff. Also, only 15% of elementary and 25% of high school principals report dissatisfaction with the education on child abuse and neglect provided by their districts. This contrasts sharply with the 66% of teachers who reported that the education on child abuse and neglect provided to them by their schools was insufficient (Abrahams, Casey & Daro, 1989).

Reporting

The pervasiveness of the child abuse and neglect problem is evidenced by the fact that every principal indicated seeing at least one case of suspected abuse and neglect on an annual basis. Forty one percent of elementary school and 45% of high school principals reported seeing between one and five cases annually, 47% of elementary and 48% of high schools reported seeing 5 to 15 cases annually, 9% of elementary and 3% of high school reported seeing 16 to 30 cases annually, and 3% of both samples reported seeing over 30 cases annually. Elementary principals reporting above median levels of "school problems" (e.g. poor standardized test scores, low levels of funding) and "environmental problems" (e.g. violence, vandalism, drug abuse) saw more cases of maltreatment as reflected in Table 3.

In addition to seeing cases of child abuse and neglect, principals indicate that they report these cases to child

protective services. Though only 61% of elementary school and 67% of high school principals respond that they reported every case of suspected child abuse and neglect, 92% of elementary and 85% of high school principals say they report over 90% of suspected cases. No one in the high school sample responded that they report fewer than 50% of the cases that come to their attention, while only 3% of the elementary school sample did so. Separate from whether or not they do report, principals were asked about what they consider to be major barriers to formal reporting of these cases.

As summarized in Table 4, elementary school and high school principals were very similar in what they perceive as possible barriers. The most significant barriers reported were: fear of reprisal against the child (60% of elementary school principals and 56% of high school principals), lack of faith in CPS intervention (59% of elementary school principals and 44% of high school principals), and lack of knowledge on how to identify or report cases of child abuse and neglect (44% of elementary schools and 47% of high schools). School board disapproval (.7% of elementary principals and no high school principals) and lack of school or community support (6% for both samples of principals) were not considered serious barriers to reporting.

Table 3

Number of Observed Child Abuse Cases
by School and Environmental Problems

Elementary School Problems[a]

	Below Median Scale Score[c]	Above Median Score	Distribution Of All Reports
Less than 5 cases annually	62%	29%	41%
5-15 cases annually	36%	52%	47%
16-30 cases annually	2%	15%	9%
Over 30 cases annually	0	4%	3%
n=138	100%	100%	100%

$x^2 = 17.39$ DF=3 $p < .001$

Elementary School Environmental Problems[b]

	Below Median Scale Score[c]	Above Median Score	Distribution Of All Reports
Less than 5 cases annually	57%	28%	41%
5-15 cases annually	37%	55%	47%
16-30 cases annually	5%	12%	9%
Over 30 cases annually	1	4%	3%
n=139	100%	100%	100%

$x^2 = 12.33$ DF=3 $p < .01$

[a] School problem scores were computed on the basis of the following problems: truancy, dropouts, poor standardized test performance, teacher dissatisfaction, staff retention, level of parental involvement, level of funding, and quality of academic materials.

[b] Environmental problem scores were based on: violence, vandalism, discipline, pregnancy, drug abuse, and racial tension.

[c] Elementary schools were given one point for every problem to which the principal responded that it was an issue at all for his or her school. As virtually all high school principals reported greater levels of problems, high schools were given one point for every problem the principal rated as affecting 5% or more of his or her school.

Table 4

Suspected Barriers to Reporting

	Elementary Schools	High Schools
Fear of reprisal against child	60%	56%
Lack of faith in CPS intervention	59%	44%
Lack sufficient knowledge on how to detect and report cases of child abuse and neglect	44%	47%
Fear of parental reprisal against school personnel	40%	22%
Interference in family privacy	39%	44%
Parental denial and disapproval	39%	25%
Legal ramifications for false allegations	34%	41%
Belief case is better dealt with by school or other outside referrals	9%	25%
Lack of community or school support	6%	6%
School Board disapproval	.7%	0%

Teachers' perceived barriers somewhat parallel NPS findings. Fifty-two percent of teachers noted fear of reprisal against the child compared to 60% and 56% of elementary and high school principals, respectively. Also similar to principals, over a third of teachers cited parental denial and interference in the family as barriers. Teachers, however, were comparatively more apt to cite fear of legal ramifications and lack of knowledge on how to detect child abuse as impediments to reporting suspected cases.

Principals were also asked specifically about their satisfaction with the responses of child protective services (CPS). As indicated in Table 5, only a quarter of both samples report that they are very satisfied with CPS. Interestingly, those elementary school principals who report low satisfaction with CPS are more likely to report lack of faith in CPS as a barrier to reporting (see Table 6).

Referrals

Beyond reporting, many principals take additional action when faced with a suspected case of child abuse or neglect. In fact, the majority of child abuse cases observed by school personnel are provided some form of intervention. Eighty two percent of elementary principals and 79% of high school principals refer the child to the school counselor or social worker, 36% of elementary and 39% of high school principals refer the family to the school counselor or social worker, 42% of elementary and 40% of high school principals contact or meet with

Table 5

Satisfaction with Child Protective Services

	Elementary Schools	High Schools
Dissatisfied	45%	41%
Satisfied	30%	34%
Very Satisfied	25%	25%
	n=148	n=32

Table 6

Elementary School Principals

Perceive lack of faith in CPS as reporting barrier	Satisfaction with CPS Response		
	Low	Average	High
Yes	64.7%	28.2%	7.1%
No	17.7%	32.3%	50%

n=147

$x^2 = 48.51$ DF=4 $p < .0000$

the parents themselves, and 57% of elementary and 70% of high school principals report that their schools make referrals for outside services such as counseling or to providers of material goods. It is worth noting that though most school intervention is focused on treatment of the child rather than the parent or the family as a whole, a considerable number of principals do meet with parents and/or try to make services available to the whole family.

Not only in situations involving child abuse, but also when faced with a host of other problems as well, the majority of principals report that their schools make referrals whenever it is deemed appropriate. Ninety four percent of elementary and 100% of high school principals report that their schools make referrals to outside counseling or treatment, 92% of elementary and 91% of high school principals report that their schools help connect families in need to agencies that can provide services such as clothing or shelter, 49% of elementary and 91% of high school principals report that their schools make referrals for substance abuse treatment, and 85% of elementary and 91% of high school principals report referrals for family counseling. Elementary schools and high schools are quite similar, it appears, in the types and amounts of referring that they do, except in case of elementary schools and substance abuse treatment. This is probably because less substance abuse is seen at the elementary school level.

PREVENTION SERVICES

Overall, survey findings show that principals believe that the provision of child abuse prevention services in schools is important. When asked how important it is for their school to provide child abuse prevention activities, 82% of elementary and 70% of high school principals responded it was very important, 13% of elementary school and 15% of high school principals responded it was of average importance and only 5% of elementary and 15% of high school principals rated these activities as of less than average importance. Similar support for prevention services was found among teachers (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989). Specifically, over 90% of teachers supported the implementation of sexual assault prevention programs, perceiving them as valuable and effective in teaching children to protect themselves. Additionally, over 80% of teachers rated counseling and support services to abusive families as well as modeling non-violent conflict resolution as above average in importance to schools' efforts to prevent child abuse. Ratings on how important principals feel it is for their schools to provide specific prevention services are shown in Table 7.

Both elementary school and high school principals rated prevention services as being important to their schools. Substance abuse prevention and child sexual assault prevention education were rated as most important for elementary schools. Education in parenting skills and child development for teen age parents were rated as most important for high schools.

Table 7

Prevention Services

	Greater Than Average Importance	Average Importance	Less Than Average Importance
Elementary Schools			
Substance Abuse Prevention Programs	91%	4%	5%
Child Sexual Assault Prevention Education	78%	18%	4%
Parent Education Classes (for parents)	76%	21%	3%
Conflict Resolution/non-violent Discipline for Parents	75%	17%	9%
Conflict Resolution for Students	73%	23%	4%
Conflict Resolution/non-violent Discipline for Teachers	71%	20%	9%
AIDS Prevention Education	69%	17%	14%
Latchkey Programs	68%	24%	8%
Support Groups for Parents/Families	64%	26%	10%
n=152			
High Schools			
Parenting Skills (for teen parents)	87%	10%	3%
Education in Child Development (teen parents)	87%	10%	3%
Substance Abuse Prevention Programs	85%	9%	6%
Home Management Skills (teen parents)	80%	13%	7%
Life Skills/Pre-parenting Education	76%	15%	9%
Conflict Resolution Skills for Students	76%	3%	21%
Job Training (Teen Parents)	71%	29%	0%
AIDS Prevention Education	70%	18%	12%
Special Academic Assistance (Teen Parents)	68%	23%	10%
Home Management Skills	64%	30%	6%
Conflict Resolution for Teachers	64%	18%	18%
Support Groups for Survivors of Abuse	59%	25%	16%
Support Groups (Teen Parents)	58%	26%	16%
Support Groups for Parents/Families	58%	15%	26%
Conflict Resolution for Parents	49%	27%	24%
Conflict Resolution for Teen Parents	49%	27%	24%
Special Programs for Teen Fathers	36%	36%	29%
n=34			

Interestingly, attitudes toward prevention services were not significantly different by region of the country or by the presence of environmental or school problems. Schools exhibiting fewer of the problems identified in Table 3 were not less likely to support the provision of expanded prevention services, suggesting that the perceived value of prevention services has transcended those issues commonly associated with elevated risk for maltreatment.

Results also show that schools do not work alone in their efforts to prevent child abuse. Schools are involved in an array of joint service efforts with other organizations. They are most likely to work with social service agencies (89% of elementary and 94% of high schools), followed by police (74% of elementary and 85% of high schools) and then hospitals (32% of elementary and 33% of high schools). Further, 43% of elementary and 27% of high school principals report that their school is part of a multidisciplinary team review system. Only 5% of elementary and 18% of high school principals report that their school is part of a coalition working together to address issues of child abuse and neglect. Many schools are involved in parenting programs. Forty-five percent of elementary and 15% of high schools report developing parenting programs which they make available to the larger community. Such programs include STEPS, Megaskills, Good Touch-Bad Touch and Parent Effectiveness Training, as well as less formal programs on parenting, drug abuse prevention, and child abuse prevention.

Corporal Punishment

The use of corporal punishment was found prevalent in the schools examined. Fifty two percent of elementary school and 27% of high school principals reported that their schools allow the practice of corporal punishment on students. However, this acceptance of corporal punishment varied significantly by region of the country, as indicated in Table 8.

These regional differences are consistent with other data on corporal punishment. Twenty states prohibit the use of corporal punishment in schools (EVANG, 1990). States that have abolished this practice are predominantly located in the Northeastern region of the United States. Upon analysis of Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights 1985-1986 data, the National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment in Schools found that of the 10 states with the highest rates of corporal punishment, all but one (Ohio) are located in either the South or the Southwest (NCACPS, 1989).

Principals were also asked whether they thought abolishing corporal punishment was important for the prevention of child abuse. Of elementary principals, 40% reported it was unimportant, 22% said it was of average importance, and 38% said it was very important. The corresponding percentages for high school principals are 39%, 9%, and 52%. Nineteen percent of teachers responding to the NTS study rated abolishing corporal punishment as unimportant, 15% felt it was of average importance, and 56%

Table 8

Corporal Punishment

Elementary Schools

	School Permits	School Prohibits
North	0%	100%
Midwest	29%	71%
South	76%	25%
Southwest	67%	33%
n=147		
Chi Square=48.05	DF=3	P<.0000

High Schools

	School Permits	School Prohibits
North	0%	100%
Midwest	60%	40%
South	33%	67%
Southwest	7%	93%
n=31		

$x^2 = 7.36$ DF=3 P < .06

*Significance tests were not run due to the size of the sample.

felt it was of above average importance.[1] Because there was some possibility that those not using corporal punishment might be those most apt to think its abolishment unimportant, the data were examined in more detail. As indicated in Table 9, those principals whose schools permit the use of corporal punishment are more likely to think its abolishment unimportant. Of those who responded that abolishing corporal punishment is not important for the prevention of child abuse, 81% of elementary school principals and 78% of high school principals are from schools that permit its use.

DISCUSSION

Efforts to address the vastly complex social problem of child abuse have looked to schools to provide early detection and prevention services. NCPCA's research has documented educator responses to this phenomenon on many levels. District superintendents have acted to set policies for the reporting of child abuse and neglect and to mandate child assault prevention education (Daro, Casey, & Abrahams, 1990). Teachers have revealed their commitment to reporting, intervening, and preventing child abuse, but have also indicated dissatisfaction with their own formal training on how to handle abuse situations. Finally, the recently conducted National Principal Survey provides insight into perspectives and actions at the administrative level.

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[1] Ten percent did not respond because their school did not permit its use. (Abrahams, Casey, & Daro, 1989).

Table 9

Elementary Schools

	Importance of Abolishing Corporal Punishment		
	Low	Average	High
Permits Corporal Punishment	81.4%	50%	21.1%
Prohibits Corporal Punishment	18.6%	50%	78.9%

n=148

$x^2 = 42.23$ DF=2 $p < .0000$

High School

	Importance of Abolishing Corporal Punishment		
	Low	Average	High
Permits Corporal Punishment	53.8%	0%	11%
Prohibits Corporal Punishment	46.2%	100%	88.2%

n=33

$x^2 = 7.81$ DF=2 $p < .05$

Further, the NPS allows comparative analysis of principal, district, and teacher level data.

An examination of school policies on child abuse and neglect reporting suggests certain discrepancies between principal and teacher awareness levels. The NPS finding that approximately 95% of principals indicated having clearly defined procedures on reporting suspected cases is in marked contrast to the findings of the National Teacher Survey. That survey found that although virtually all school districts had established these policies, only 57% of teachers were aware of their existence.

Overall NPS findings indicate that principals are satisfied with both the information and education they provide to school staff on child abuse and neglect as well as the education provided by their districts. Only 28% of elementary school principals reported dissatisfaction with their schools training on child abuse and neglect and 15% reported feeling their district's provision of training on this topic was insufficient. While principals may feel confident with their own knowledge of child abuse and believe they are imparting sufficient information to their teachers, the classroom teacher is not as satisfied. As noted earlier, over two-thirds of teachers in the NTS study reported that the education provided them on child abuse and neglect was insufficient. In that the role of the principal and teacher concerning child abuse and neglect cases differ, primarily in the nature of their contact with children, the quality and amount of education needed to effectively assume

their respective roles may account for the disparate results. Better communication needs to be established between principals and teachers to ensure the adequate education of those professionals who must confront child abuse on a daily basis.

Suspicions that principals may be implementing their own screening process and failing to report suspected cases of abuse reported to them by school personnel were not supported by the NPS data. With more than 60% of principals reporting every case to child protective services and more than 85% reporting over 90% of the cases brought to their attention, these school administrators appear to be acting in accordance with their legal mandate. Zellman's study of reporting by various types of professionals mandated to report child abuse and neglect supports the finding that school principals are committed reporters (Zellman, 1990).

Despite NPS and NTS findings that paint a relatively clear picture of reporting activity within schools, the path of these reports, once out of the school system lacks clarity. More specifically, the National Incidence Study (Westat, 1988) found that only 24% of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect recognized by school personnel were known to Child Protective Services.[2] Recalling that 90% of teachers from the NTS study and a similarly high percentage of principals were revealed by the NPS as committed reporters, the fact that their reports are not

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[2] Upon further analysis of the NIS data, Westat reported that it is impossible to distinguish between cases never reported and cases screened out prior to investigation (Westat, 1989).

accounted for in CPS data is puzzling. Zellman (1990) proposes that school personnel are indeed reporting, in fact more so than any other single group of mandated reporters. Their reports, however, are screened out by CPS prior to investigation. In conducting interviews with CPS staff, she found "school staff were often cited as a major problem for CPS precisely because of their willingness to report. CPS staff frequently expressed annoyance with school staff for so often reporting cases they considered less serious because they did not involve an immediate threat to the child's life or serious injury...."(Zellman, 1990, p.11). School staff are not alone in their frustration with screening. Caseworkers also note frustration with the fact that they can accept only "crisis" cases (Mitchel, 1990).

Thus, in spite of educators' commitment to early detection of cases, the situation among child protective services is such that they will not accept these cases until their level of severity increases. High reporting rates are evidenced by schools despite the fact that roughly half of principals (59% of elementary and 44% of high school) indicate lack of faith in CPS as a possible barrier to the reporting of abuse and neglect, and 45% of elementary school principals and 41% of high school principals indicate dissatisfaction with CPS responses. As Zellman (1990) pointed out, dissatisfaction with CPS response coupled with inattention to reports made by schools may alter the willingness of school personnel to make reports in the future.

In the face of possibly limited intervention coming as a result of making reports to CPS, the NPS did uncover some very positive findings. Though CPS may not be in a position to respond to incidents of abuse and neglect that are not immediately threatening to a child's life, once school personnel recognize possible abuse or neglect, they go beyond mere reporting. Eighty-two percent of the elementary and 79% of the high school principals are referring students to counseling services, with significant numbers providing referrals for the family as a whole. This is important because not only does the child need to be helped, but action must be taken to stop the cycle of abuse. Over a third of responding principals themselves also are contacting and meeting with parents. Even in situations involving issues other than abuse, over 90% of the principals routinely provide counseling and other social service referrals.

In spite of the fact that schools are being asked to cope with a myriad of social problems in addition to their academic responsibilities (Conte and Fogarty, 1990), schools seem committed to addressing the issue of child abuse and its prevention. Ninety-five percent of the elementary and 85% of the high school principals rated the provision of child abuse prevention services as average to above average in importance. Moreover, sexual assault prevention, substance abuse prevention, and conflict resolution were ranked as above average importance by over three-quarters of the respondents. Further, these programs are sometimes implemented in collaboration with social

service agencies and the police. Hence, principals and schools are not only committed to preventing child abuse and a host of other related problems, but they are willing to reach out to outside professionals to accomplish their goals.

Contrary to findings demonstrating strong commitment to the prevention of child abuse, principals were found to be divided on the issue of corporal punishment in schools. Though a significant number of principals (38% of elementary and 52% of high school) do think abolishing corporal punishment is important for the prevention of child abuse, there are still a great number who have not been persuaded of a connection between hitting as a form of discipline in schools and child abuse (40% of elementary principals and 39% of high school principals). Evidence that this connection is not being made is provided by the respondents ratings of non-violent conflict resolution classes. Principals whose schools use corporal punishment and who do not think its abolishment is important are just as likely as those who don't use corporal punishment to think it is important for teachers, parents, and students to learn non-violent conflict resolution skills. As others have noted, one might wonder how effective any learning can be in schools that paddle children as a response to their misconduct (Moelis, 1988).

While the NPS and NTS samples may not represent schools nationwide, this series of studies is believed to be the first attempt to comprehensively assess child abuse prevention efforts in public schools. As the majority of children attend these

schools at some time in their lives, teachers and principals are on the frontline of child abuse identification. The fact that these schools utilize an array of outside services in helping children and families is encouraging. However, the questions raised by the CPS lack of response to reports made by school personnel need greater examination. Future research should clarify the path a report of child abuse takes from the school's first contact to the CPS response in order to determine why so few cases receive attention by CPS agencies. Such research would allow for improved training of personnel and greater sensitivity on the part of CPS.

CONCLUSIONS

Results from the National Principal Survey and other NCPCA research concerning schools and child abuse yield the following conclusions:

- The vast majority of schools have written policies regarding the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Given evidence that a significant number of teachers are not fully aware of these policies, more active implementation or greater communication between principals and teachers to assess training needs in this area is warranted.
- NCPCA findings are not consistent with other data which suggest that school personnel do not report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. In fact, NCPCA data showed that both principals and teachers do actively report. Consequently, more research needs to be done to better

determine how CPS responds to reports filed by school personnel. Further, efforts should be made to establish partnerships between schools and protective service agencies to increase confidence in local child welfare systems and to better serve abused and neglected children.

- Schools are doing a laudable job at linking children at risk for child abuse and neglect to services, both within the school and in the community at large. These efforts should be encouraged and supported through expanded training efforts.
- Schools have clearly integrated primary prevention services, such as child assault prevention and parenting education, into their educational curricula. Given schools limited resources to address a multitude of social problems on their own, more coalitions and partnerships with outside agencies should be formed.

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